

Testimony of Stephen James
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Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York

Concerning the Pathways Initiative

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Pathways should be repealed because as it is being implemented, it does not accomplish the goals for which it was designed. It does not achieve academic consistency or guarantee more than nominal equivalency.

If the goal is to ensure that our students can transfer from one college to another, the Pathways initiative fails because from my perspective as a faculty member, there is a decided lack of clarity. There is no instruction given as to what the expectations are for the liberal arts courses that I teach; nor are there any directions for change. Ultimately, it is relatively easy to place a course into a particular category, however vague, in order to complete a form. However, there is no assurance that there is any change in actual curricula or in the classroom.

This flaw is evidenced in the recent New York Times article noting the existence of “top tier” CUNY colleges.¹ If the goal is really to ensure equivalency and assure transferability, then there should be a perception of equality. Pathways as it is proposed, does not address this. From the perspective of a former CUNY student, I would argue that students, who all pay the same tuition, are entitled to the same education. As it is proposed, the lack of input from faculty creates or perpetuates mistrust. The dissatisfaction with the process extends to the so-called “top tier”

¹ Perez-Pena, Richard, “At CUNY, Stricter Admissions Bring Ethnic Shift,” *New York Times*, May 22, 2012.

colleges. If the Pathways initiative does not generate trust, the goal of ensuring transferability will be subverted. There will be no greater incentive at any college to accept transfers based on courses taken at another college.

As implemented, there is a wide faculty concern that Pathways will dilute our students' educations, not enhance them. CUNY desperately needs to find a better way to improve the ability of students to transfer throughout the University.